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YPE n TALK"..... newsletter .....Volume 1 Number 2 October 1991

The following human interest story was written by Bernie Fox, a newspaper writer in Sidney, Montana. The story is a heart warming reminder of what a little technology can do to bring happiness into the lives of Montana's hearing and speech impaired. With permission from the "Sidney Herald-Leader", it is being reprinted for our readers enjoyment.] [Dan Pouliot, MTTH Director]

TELEPHONE IS NO LONGER A LIMITATION FOR SYTH

A walk through Delores Syth's house in Fairview, Montana is strikingly quiet. The television is on but runs without sound. The silence makes one uncomfortable enough to concentrate to hear even the softest sound. The only things distinguishable are the buzz of the television's picture tube, the acceleration of a car passing by on the street and the dialogue of a television in a nearby apartment. Why is it so quiet? The sounds we would hear walking through her house, although soft but still audible, go unheard by Syth. Delores Syth is deaf. Knowing that Syth is deaf, then, explains the silence. But something is still out of place. It's the telephone.

A NEW WORLD Until recently, the telephone was just another instrument that the more fortunate used - it was an instrument of the hearing. For Syth, it was just another limitation in a world full of limitations for the hearing (and speech) impaired - until now.

Syth's phone rings. Although she does not hear it, a light in her living room begins to flash. She runs to her phone, which resembles a personal computer (but is not), and reads the screen. It's her son Brent."This is Brent." the screen reads. Syth begins typing her reply and with each punch of the keyboard steps into the world she has never known before.

Syth, an energetic 65 year old, has been deaf since she was 14. A high fever caused by a kidney infection almost claimed her life but instead settled for her hearing. "The doctor only gave me a minute to live." Syth said sincerely, even though she had obviously told the story hundreds of times before. Since Syth lost her hearing over 50 years ago, she learned to use the communications that best served her.

"She has excellent handwriting", Syth's son Brent Kohlman of Fairview said while watching Syth use the screen to communicate with her other son Buck, also of Fairview. "She is a good speller too. She rarely ever misspells a word." In addition, Syth can also read lips and talk, allowing her to carry on a conversation quite well. Her speech is hard to understand for someone who does not know her well.

A NEW PROGRAM Syth was helped into the new world of communications through a program administered by the Governor's Committee on Telecommunications for the Telephone Handicapped (MTTH) of Helena. The program, requiring everyone to have equal access to telephone services, is funded through a monthly 10 cent charge on all telephone bills, and was created through state legislation during the 89 session. Syth met all of the eligibility requirements of the program, which included Montana residency, being telephone handicapped, falling within the income guidelines and being able to use the equipment (TDD) to send and receive messages through the telephone system. After the applicant is approved, Kryss Kuntz, a program specialist, trained Syth to use the system.

According to both Brent and his mother, Syth was the first person to receive the equipment in eastern Montana. A check with the MTTH office confirmed that Syth was the only person from this area in the program, although approximately 385 people use the program statewide. *(There are now four persons in the area using the system with nine more applications on file, ED.)*

At the same time Syth received her keyboard and screen in March, 1991, her son Buck also bought a machine to communicate with her. Nine months later Syth's other son Brent also purchased a small portable unit, which has a one-line screen and telephone coupler to communicate with Syth."I was kinda seeing how their's worked," Brent said about getting a machine for himself. Since getting the telephone equipment, Brent admits he communicates with his mother a lot more than he did before. "We use it just about every night now," he said. "I never used to go over and visit my mother. Maybe once or twice a month, or maybe not even that much."Brent said that his mother usually calls shortly after she watches the late-night weather, which signals a close to her television watching for the evening."It's easier this way," Kohlman admitted. Sometimes it gets to be an hour session between us."Syth's daughter is also thinking about purchasing one of the machines to talk with her mother by telephone.

The hearing and speech impaired telephone system cannot only be used to contact someone with receiving systems such like Syth's sons have, but Syth can also speak to others using another recently started program called the Montana Dual Party Relay service.

The service allows a person with speech or hearing impairments to communicate by typing a message on the screen. The relay service (operated under contract with AT&T) operator receives the message and reads it to the hearing person on the other end of the phone line. When the hearing person speaks, the operator types the message back to the hearing impaired person. The relay service also offers "voice carry-over" calls, making it possible for the hearing impaired person with good speech to talk directly with the hearing person. The relay operator types only the hearing person's reply. This also works in reverse, so a speech impaired person who can hear may listen to the hearing party, and the relay operator speaks the typed message to the hearing person.

A VOID FILLED Syth is still conversing with her son Buck, who has just gotten back from a trip to Glendive. She plucks her replies with one finger."I can type fast if I'm alone, but if someone is watching me it makes me nervous," Syth said, admitting her one-fingered style may not be the fastest way to type. Syth laughs at one of Buck's remarks as his words continue to magically appear on the screen. With every letter that appears on the screen a void in Syth's life disappears. She can now communicate spontaneously without being face to face with a person, something a letter cannot achieve. As Buck's words continue on Syth's screen, he starts to talk about how the newspaper story should give others around the area in a similar situation as his mother some hope of communicating with others by telephone. Syth just hopes that more and more people will utilize the program. She does have one fear though."They'll probably have so many messages for me that I won't be able to answer them all," Syth said, relishing the thought.

APPLY NOW

Learn more about this new telephone service for deaf, hard of hearing and speech impaired by filling out the attached form in this newsletter. RETURN IT TODAY! Your days of struggling with telephone calls are over. Remember, there is NO COST FOR THESE SERVICES to eligible applicants.

3,500 copies of this public document were published at an estimated cost of 13¢ per copy, for a total cost of $450.00, which includes $450.00 for printing and $.00 for distribution.

For More Information on Services

Return To: **Montana Telecommunications for the Telephone Handicapped**
111 North Last Chance Gulch
Helena, Montana 59620

Impairment Type

- ❑ Hard-of-Hearing
- ❑ Speech Impaired
- ❑ Deaf
- ❑ Deaf/Blind (Visually Impaired)

(1) Name of Applicant:_____
Last First MI

(2) Address:_____
Street or Box # City County Zip

To be eligible to receive equipment on loan, an applicant must:
(1) be telephone handicapped; (2) be a resident of Montana; (3) complete an equipment training session; (4) annual gross income of $35,000 or less.

Equipment Type

Amplified Handset - A device that amplifies either incoming sounds for hearing impaired individuals or outgoing sounds for speech impaired individuals.
Artificial Larynx - A hand-held speaking aid that simulates the natural vibrations of voice for people who have lost the use of their larnyx. The user presses the unit against the throat to form words with the mouth to simulate speech.
Puff-Blow Activator - This device provides full telephone service for people with severe motion impairments. The "puff" activator switch uses a breath of air to place, receive or disconnect calls.
Signal Device - A mechanical device that alerts a deaf, deaf-blind, or hard-of-hearing person of an incoming telephone call.
TDD - (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf) An electrical device for use with a telephone that utilizes a keyboard. It may also have an acoustic coupler, display screen or braille display to transmit and receive messages.
Telebraille - A two unit system designed for face-to-face and telephone communications through the use of a modified TDD equipped with a typewriter keyboard, visual display, and acoustical coupler, linked to a Braille display with a 20-cell dynamic Braille display.

MONTANA TELECOMMUNICATIONS
FOR THE TELEPHONE HANDICAPPED
111 North Last Chance Gulch
Helena, Montana 59620

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"TYPE n TALK" *Newsletter*

"providing the right telephone 'tools' to Montana's hearing and speech impaired"

Montana Telecommunications Service for the Telephone Handicapped

TDD, Amplifier, Signal Device, Relay Service